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US SOUTHERN HEADLINE COMPANY, CINCINNATI, OHIO

IN  
GOSSAMER  
GREY

—  
OSCAR  
WILLIAMS

To Mrs. Edmund Andrews

from

Oscar Williams

# In Gossamer Grey

By  
Oscar Williams



CHICAGO  
THE BOOKFELLOWS  
1921

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IN GOSSAMER GREY

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To-----

Out of the sea of dreams have you risen,  
And your hair is dripping with stars!

## DUSK IN A CITY

The sifting shadows lift and fall  
Among the lamp-posts' yellow gleams;  
The frail wind wafts the twilight down —  
The gossamer grey dust of dreams.

Against my pane the shadows whirl,  
While, strange and huge, a hush drifts by,  
And leaves a vastness in my room,  
A crying urge to wind and sky.

And I must dream of how the dusk  
Beyond the walls around my walls,  
Must curl a flower to send the moon  
Cascading down far waterfalls.

And I must dream of how the wind,  
Beyond the bars around my bars,  
Awakens elfin melodies  
Upon the silver strings of stars!

## SECRET

The silver black-browed midnight in my room  
    Frowned at the wind, and forward leaned to hear;  
A ghost of silence fled a shadow's doom  
    And whispered secret wonder in my ear.

Fear not, O you who brought all this to pass,  
    I shall not tell the mystery I know,  
Though spring should plead, and I were flowers and grass;  
    Though white-toothed frost demand, and I were snow.

Fear not, I shall not tell; O you can trust;  
    Though earth should shake beneath the tread of wars,  
I shall be like that pebble in the dust  
    That dumbly clasps the secret of the stars!

There are  
But three deep deaths:  
The sleep that follows sin,  
The sleep that follows the waking,  
And sleep. . .



## SHADOWS

What though in silver drapery  
The night is proud on sea and hill  
When little wind-haired shadows fear  
To cross a lighted window sill!

What though life wears its high romance  
Of shimmering silver, twinkling foam,  
When wistful shadows cry upon  
The edge of cheerfulness and home!

It may be the stars have been dead  
For more than a million years  
And what we see  
Is their light traveling through space.

It may be my dreams have been dead  
For centuries  
And what I feel  
Is their light traveling through song.

## LATE O' NIGHTS

Once when I wrote poems  
Late into the night  
And used the gas my father paid bills for  
(Which he strongly resented),  
I was always in terror  
Of the thud — thud — thud —  
Of his bare feet in the hallway.

I remember that when he caught me  
He raised a howling uproar,  
And woke the terrified household,  
And cursed me roundly,  
And turned out the light,  
And my head ached and screamed  
Till I buried it in the cool asylum  
Of the pillowy bed.

Now I pay my own gas-bills,  
But still late in the night  
When my thoughts surge in delirium,  
Suddenly a hush drifts into my brain  
From the bourne of silence,  
And down the stones of the hallway  
I hear coming towards me  
The thud — thud — thud —  
Of Something with bare feet. . .

## EYES

Sometimes I hold a glass before my face  
And, gazing into my own life-filled eyes,  
I think of the passion that behind them lies,  
The centuries of pride and creed and race,  
The myriads of memories under sway —  
The dawns and sunsets jostling there, the sea  
Foam-fringed, bent flowers listening for a bee,  
Even the lips of love I kissed only to-day.

All this and more . . . but suddenly I know  
My brain, that holds these memories all in pawn,  
Is rummaging in darkness once again,  
And I must see my eyes as other men  
Have always seen, and still will see them, so —  
As windows, strange and closed, with curtains drawn. . .

## A SLIGHT REMARK

Of the dead  
We say, "The late so-and-so,  
The late thus-and-thus,"  
*They*  
Who are so much earlier  
Than we!

## I THOUGHT TO HIDE MY HEART

I thought to hide my aching heart, —  
To wall it in, the whole night long,  
With dance of feet, with colored lights,  
With laughter and with song.

I thought to hide my bitter heart, —  
To wall it in, for just one night,  
But Oh, what have I done? — My heart  
Looks out of every light.

My heart cries out in every song, —  
Oh, what is this that I have done?  
I have a thousand breaking hearts,  
Who had but only one!

The window's rectangle of gold  
Spreads a wide trap of light  
Over the snow,  
But the eyes of the night  
Are dark with suspicion  
And she keeps wisely  
Aloof.



## ALL THE WHILE

Many have been within my dwelling-place,  
And I have merry-made in sun and rain,  
But all the while I saw like a strange face,  
Loneliness prowling round my window pane.

I have laughed loudly, sung, spoken with guile,  
And danced and rioted and longed for more,  
But underneath, insistent all the while,  
I heard the silence knocking on my door.

## ROOFS

Dream, Oh men, to reach the sky,  
Build your roofs and build them high;  
From the earth where soft grass drowns  
Take the rock to build your houses;  
From the plains where beauty roams  
Take the shadows for your homes;  
Build and dream to reach the sky, —  
Dreams are dear, but truth is dearer, —  
If your roofs were not so high,  
Oh, your blue sky would be nearer!



## IN A TENEMENT

### *First Floor*

"Little square with cobwebbed shadows,  
I would not have you keep so aloof,  
I have a gas-light guttering under you,  
You are my roof."

### *Second Floor*

"Little square with cobwebbed shadows,  
You run too eagerly to the door,  
I have a table and chair upon you,  
You are my floor."

## TWILIGHT BEFORE THE DAWN

The twilight's shadow-vivid drapery  
Is rustling through the skies before the dawn;  
Her wind-filled folds are moist with cloud and sea,  
And blow against the stars till they are gone.

The twilight hastens on, but all the day  
Myriads of twilights under grey waves blow,  
While white dreams floating down the great blue way  
Are touched with shadow of a garment's flow.

## TO J. B.

In a strange land where lost moonlight wanders,  
And star-pinned rainbows arch the temples of the skies,  
Where winds ruffle the golden feathers of sleeping waters  
That wake, with myriad little planets in their eyes, —  
In a strange land, through whose twilight of magic,  
Vanished, colored moons once mysteriously stole,  
Where star-dew is peopled with tiny elf-gleams,  
And every little shadow has a trembling soul,—  
In that strange land of King Marvel and Queen Glamour,  
Where the Sphinx whispers, and old gods are new,  
In that strange land of everlasting wonder,  
Dear friend, we keep our unseen rendezvous!

## HEARTS

O hearts there are that cry at night  
And hearts that sing by day,  
But hearts that cannot cry or sing  
Must dumbly waste away.

O hearts that cry are eased in storms,  
And hearts that sing, in peace,  
But silent hearts in all the world  
Can never find release!

## THE DOOR OF YOUTH

The door of youth was open,  
And love who heard no din,  
Was lured by the very silence  
And entered in.

The door of youth was open,  
And grave-eyed age drew nigh,  
Who looked in, smiling kindly,  
And then went by.

## SONG

The wild birds sing for joy of spring  
But unto me who dream and long,  
Pain is a stabbing melody  
And sadness is a song.

But grief is patient evermore,  
And I will wait till that far day  
When Happiness will come to me  
And blow my songs away!

## O LITTLE WAIF

O little waif from fairyland,  
My heart can never be your home,  
For you belong where free winds kiss  
The ocean's white lips pursed in foam.

O little waif from fairyland,  
I have no comforting for you,  
Your hope is in some magic night  
Where silver moonbeams kiss the dew.

O little, crying, homeless waif,  
If you could only understand,  
My heart can never be the home  
You could not find in fairyland!

You are coming, love,  
You are coming;  
A flower lifts her head in the wind  
And listens.



## THE ANSWER

When I ask God  
The why of my little sins,  
And God is silent,  
I know the answer.

But when God comes to me  
With wistful questions in the dusk,  
With wild demands in the wind,  
I, too, must be silent . . .

A poet said,  
"What is in a name?"  
But I had a beautiful meaning  
And I forgot to name it,  
And now  
How can I call it  
Out of the depth?



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